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Life and Death of a Terrorist

THE QUEST FOR THE RED PRINCE

By Michael Bar-Zohar and Eitan Haber.
Illustrated. 232 pp. New York:
William Morrow & Co. \$15.95.

By JAMES M. MARKHAM

ALI HASSAN SALAMEH, one of Yasir Arafat's most trusted lieutenants, was blown up in his car as it passed a booby-trapped parked Volkswagen in West Beirut on Jan. 22, 1979. In "The Quest for the Red Prince," Michael Bar-Zohar and Eitan Haber, two Israeli writers, give a fast-paced account of how the Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service, tracked Salameh for months and assassinated him. They have also tried to blend into the tale of the Palestinian leader's violent life and death a history of the struggle between Arabs and Jews in Palestine before 1948, in the young state of Israel and in shadowy theaters of operation elsewhere.

Abu Hassan, as the flamboyant Fatah chief was known, was the son of Sheik Hassan Salameh, a Palestinian warlord who died in 1948 fighting the emergence of Israel. The sheik's son was no scruffy, unshaven gun toter but a sleek German-educated playboy who shortly before his death married a former Miss Universe, a Lebanese Christian named Georgina Rizak. He was also a terrorist, one of the masterminds of Black September, the Fatah subgroup that shoved the Palestinian cause into the world's horrified consciousness by murdering 11 Israeli athletes during the Munich Olympics in 1972.

But Salameh's most fascinating sideline and the one most relevant to his death is not mentioned in this book. As the boss of Squad 17, the Fatah security outfit, he was Mr. Arafat's contact with the United States Embassy in Beirut and the Central Intelligence Agency.

While Mr. Bar-Zohar and Mr. Haber would have us believe that in "the Muslim-inhabited part of war-torn Beirut all foreigners were distrusted" and "all Westerners were suspected of being Israeli spies or secret agents," the truth was far more subtle and paradoxical. During Mr. Arafat's persistent efforts to open a dialogue with the United States, Al Fatah took it on itself to protect American diplomats in chaotic West Beirut after civil war erupted in 1975. Salameh's men guarded Americans and other foreigners as they were evacuated from a West Beirut seaside swimming club by the United States Sixth Fleet on June 20, 1976. An American diplomat I knew in Beirut in those bizarre years liked to show off with a chuckle a gift from Abu Hassan — a heavy Palestine Liberation Organization key chain.

As David Ignatius reported recently in The Wall Street Journal, Salameh was "a backdoor channel between the U.S. and the P.L.O.," and he furnished senior American diplomats, including former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, with tips about assassination plots planned by radical Palestinian and other terrorist groups. He is also said to have supplied similar information to security organizations in West Germany, Italy and Japan to demonstrate that Al Fatah had gone out of the terror business and become a valid diplomatic interlocutor.

One revealing and heretofore untold anecdote is that not long before Salameh's death, a grateful C.I.A. took him to Florida's Walt Disney World, a place he had always wanted to visit. This uniquely American gesture compounded Mr. Arafat's bitterness and sense of betrayal when Salameh was slain.

There was nothing angelic about Al Fatah's stealthy

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